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UNICEF EMERGENCY SERVICES: MISSION AND STRATEGIES

SUMMARY

The present report responds to Executive Board decision 1994/A/8 (paragraphs 5 (a) and (b) (E/ICEF/1994/13/Rev.1) which requested the secretariat to prepare a strategy paper on UNICEF emergency assistance. The paper summarizes the purpose of UNICEF, the guiding concepts which underpin its emergency response strategies, and the initiation of the measures necessary to ensure UNICEF capacity as an effective humanitarian partner in emergency cooperation. Executive Board approval is sought for the strategic approach taken and for the proposed directions for UNICEF cooperation in emergencies.

Mission. In times of emergency which pose a violent, extreme and often sudden threat to the survival, protection and development rights of children and women and to the integrity and stability of the family, UNICEF advocates for the special protection and care of affected children and women and extends assistance to them impartially, without discrimination and on the basis of need.

* E/ICEF/1996/2.

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I. PURPOSE

1. UNICEF gives special emphasis to any extreme threat to the well-being of children and defines emergencies accordingly. UNICEF considers an emergency to be any situation in which the lives and well-being of children are at such risk that extraordinary action, i.e. urgently required action beyond that routinely provided, must be mobilized to ensure their survival, protection and well-being. A situation is no longer considered an emergency when such threats and risks no longer exist, or when the UNICEF response to that threat can be provided as an integral part of routine/regular programme activities.

2. In response to acute threats to children, UNICEF commits itself to a four-pronged emergency approach: (a) preventive actions, through which the acute threat or risks to children are identified, monitored and eliminated or reduced by addressing root causes; (b) readiness/preparedness measures, which will ensure that, if required, emergency assistance will be effective, timely and appropriate; (c) emergency assistance, through the provision of a range of goods and services in the midst of crisis necessary to assure the survival, protection and essential developmental needs of children; and (d) rehabilitation and recovery assistance, to help victims towards physical, social and psychological recovery, to restore and re-establish life systems and to re-establish basic services and service delivery systems.

3. Within the objective of ensuring the protection and care of all children in emergency situations, UNICEF recognizes the need for special protection and care efforts for children who are at an especially acute risk, including children who are separated from their families, deprived of essential care, traumatized, and sexually or otherwise abused or exploited.

4. To achieve the aims of ensuring the protection and care of children in emergencies, UNICEF is committed to coordinated, collective action. As a member of the United Nations family, it supports collaborative United Nations efforts and recognizes the unique roles of non-governmental agencies, community-based organizations, centres of excellence and specialized bodies. It emphasizes supporting and enhancing the capacity of responsible authorities, communities and families to fulfil their respective roles in preventing harm to children, aiding children in need and facilitating their recovery.

5. UNICEF advocates for the protection and care of children in accordance with the principles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international humanitarian covenants. UNICEF extends assistance to affected children and women impartially, without discrimination and on the basis of need.

II. MANDATE

6. UNICEF was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1946 (resolution 57 (I) of 11 December) for the benefit of children and adolescents. Its global mandate to meet the emergency and long-range needs of children was affirmed by the General Assembly in 1950 (resolution 417 (V) of 1 December) and made indefinite in 1953 (resolution 802 (VIII) of 6 October). As the agency of

the United Nations responsible for cooperation to ensure the survival, protection and development of the child without discrimination, UNICEF has a long-standing mandate on behalf of children in emergencies world-wide.

7. In the founding resolutions of 1947, several principles were established to guide UNICEF emergency actions. As stated in Economic and Social Council resolution 44 (IV) (annex, section B) of 29 March 1947: "Emergency measures shall be so developed and administered as to utilize and strengthen the permanent child health and child welfare programmes of the countries receiving assistance, and promote effective co-ordination of official and voluntary services." The need for collaborative action, in particular with other activities of the United Nations, also was explicitly noted.

8. The General Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed the UNICEF mandate to provide emergency assistance, including the provision of assistance to child victims in armed conflicts. In 1967, 1968 and 1969, the General Assembly noted with approval the continuing efforts of UNICEF to provide emergency aid to children and mothers in situations of urgent need, while placing increasing emphasis on long-term programmes.

9. In 1981, the Executive Board reaffirmed UNICEF involvement in emergency relief, rehabilitation and special situations. In the following decade, Board resolutions have urged UNICEF (a) to mitigate the effects on children of natural and man-made disasters and of armed conflict; (b) to build upon the concept of children as a zone of peace; (c) to respond rapidly in emergency situations; (d) to continue to provide emergency assistance to refugee and displaced women and children; and (e) to give particular attention to addressing gender-specific needs in emergencies. In 1991, the unique role of UNICEF in ensuring implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was recognized.

10. Standards established by international agreement provide a broad framework for actions on behalf of children in emergencies. UNICEF recognizes the standards of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, now almost universally ratified, as applicable in all situations, including situations of armed conflict. Standards relating to children and women in other standing international agreements are also accepted as key references.

11. The UNICEF mandate to provide emergency assistance to meet the health and welfare needs of children, to strengthen national capacities and to assist through collaborative action remain deeply-rooted operating tenets of the organization.

III. THREATS

12. Acute threats to the well-being of children are recognized as potentially arising from any number of causes, both natural and man-made. Violent, sudden and destructive circumstances, such as wars, civil strife or natural disasters and land-mines left behind, pose obvious threats. UNICEF also recognizes that silent and insidious hazards, such as prolonged drought, environmental disaster or any other hazard, can equally create emergencies for children and their families.

13. The nature of humanitarian crises is constantly changing. The emergence of new emergency threats to children are to be expected and, indeed, are presenting themselves - the HIV virus, ecological disasters, water shortages, food grain shortages, new technological hazards, for example. The last decade also has seen changes in the nature of armed conflict, including more intra-state conflicts, increased targeting of children and civilians, and some of the worst violations of human rights this century. In several situations, in the midst of conflict, public, political and economic systems have collapsed or fragmented so completely that common systems of governance no longer exist.

14. The scale of emergencies continues to expand as a function of both an increasing global population and of the growing vulnerability of every larger numbers of families. Increasingly, wars are waged over whole countries, and an increasing percentage of affected populations are displaced or victimized. The rising number of people reliant upon marginal and increasingly fragile ecosystems translates into increasing vulnerability for ever larger numbers of children from related hazards.

15. The severity of emergencies continues to increase. All emergencies, whether natural or man-made, affect civilians - and among them, the children and women of the most vulnerable and marginalized families - most severely. It is the children of the poorest who are to be found on the most vulnerable land, in the most vulnerable houses and who are the hardest hit by natural disasters. The increasing impact is reflected in the severe social, cultural, political and economic dislocation caused by current armed conflicts in the midst of which children and women are not only incidental victims, but increasingly targeted for willful violence and abuse, as well as for the denial of access to basic services and essential relief supplies or food.

16. The causes of present and anticipated emergencies increasingly are recognized as complex and multifaceted. Many types of emergencies now constitute chronic realities which blur the traditional distinction between emergency and non-emergency situations. Pressures of underdevelopment, unemployment and poverty, population growth and environmental degradation are overlaid by ethnic, religious and cultural tensions, political instability, resource disparity, poor governance and spiraling violence.

IV. GUIDING CONCEPTS

17. UNICEF works towards the day when children no longer face acute threats to their survival, protection or development. But until the time that such hazards as earthquakes, floods, food shortages, epidemics and wars no longer pose threats to children, UNICEF remains committed to the range of activities required to ensure the protection and well-being of children in the face of such emergencies. The UNICEF emergency response is guided by the concepts listed below.

18. The child and family imperative. The UNICEF emergency response focuses specifically on issues related to acute threats to the protection and well-being of children. Within a child-centred approach, particular emphasis is given to reinforcing the capacity of the family to protect and care for the child.

Community governance, association, economic fabric and service provision are also recognized as critical elements of family and child well-being as are public policy systems at community and national levels.

19. Need-based. UNICEF responds to needs. Many factors influence the need for UNICEF intervention: severity of the impact of a hazard situation on children and on their families; family, community and national capacities to meet the emergency-related needs; availability of required resources; and assistance offered by others. UNICEF recognizes the special needs of the girl child.

20. Holistic. In assessing and responding to the emergency needs of children, UNICEF recognizes the need for a holistic consideration of the complex range of determinants of child well-being and the synergy between physical and emotional security, social and cognitive development, and the health and nutritional status of children. The concepts of protection and care of children include the full range of such needs.

21. Participatory. UNICEF holds that the participatory approach is most effective in empowering families, communities and national systems to meet the emergency needs of children and to stimulate recovery. UNICEF seeks to enable local organizations and institutions to participate in the design, implementation and monitoring of emergency-related interventions.

22. Systemic and ongoing. While a role exists for specialized readiness and response services, UNICEF holds that emergency preparedness and response must be an integrated and ongoing aspect of all systems which play a role in the protection and well-being of children. Accordingly, preparedness and emergency response are an integral part of regular country programming efforts of UNICEF. not separate from it.

23. Developmental. UNICEF advocates a developmental approach to emergency-related activities. What is meant by developmental approach is the linkage of relief and development by emphasizing local capacity-building to meet emergency needs, to reduce the vulnerability of children to possible future emergencies and to promote self-reliance. It means addressing emergency vulnerabilities within non-emergency development efforts and ensuring that emergency assistance is provided in ways that build capacities while meeting needs. Implicit in the reduction of vulnerability is the need to address root causes of acute threats to the well-being of children and to strengthen vulnerable health, basic education and social services systems upon which their well-being depends.

24. Situationally appropriate. UNICEF recognizes four broad types of critical situations in which emergency response may be required and the need for unique strategies to ensure the care and protection of children in each: (a) when a national Government is willing and able to provide the humanitarian assistance required by affected children and women and no assistance is required of UNICEF; (b) when a national Government is willing to assist, but requires international assistance to help meet the needs of women and children; (c) when a segment of the affected women and child population exists outside the care and protection of a Government and extraordinary approaches to the provision of protection and

assistance may be required; and (d) in those exceptional circumstances when government systems collapse or fragment so completely that UNICEF - and other external partners - may be required to assume temporarily a more central role in the delivery of assistance to children than would otherwise be the case.

25. Facilitative role. In responding to the emergency needs of children, UNICEF typically adopts a facilitative role that supports the efforts of families, communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), national authorities and other intervenors. A facilitative strategy, rather than a direct service role, is adopted purposefully as a means to enhance rather than displace local efforts. However, when necessary in emergency situations, UNICEF is prepared to assume, as a temporary measure, a service delivery role.

26. Partnership. To address the full range of children's emergency needs, UNICEF holds that partnership is essential. To advance the protection and care of children, UNICEF collaborates with Governments and communities, with non-governmental and community-based organizations, with other members of the United Nations family and with regional organizations and specialized centres of excellence. UNICEF works closely with the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs on matters related to the coordination of humanitarian assistance, and with all of the specialized United Nations agencies, but most closely on emergency-related issues with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

27. Coordination. For effectiveness and the efficient use of resources, UNICEF supports a coordinated approach to all emergency-related activities. What is meant by coordination is leadership, the development of a rational plan of action agreed upon by involved parties, agreement on task implementation to avoid overlap or gaps, transparency and the sharing of mutually supportive information. UNICEF holds that coordination and decision-making, while required at all administrative levels, is particularly important at the level of field operations.

28. Humanitarian principles. UNICEF, as a United Nations agency, upholds the following basic principles of humanitarian assistance - humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, empowerment and accountability.

29. Principles of cooperation. UNICEF seeks to ensure that its cooperation with partners is based on joint commitment to fundamental humanitarian principles.

V. UNICEF EMERGENCY RESPONSE

30. The UNICEF response to the emergency needs of children and women is always dependant upon the survival, protection and critical development needs of children in a situation. While the UNICEF response may, when necessary, extend beyond the sectoral concerns defined below, in all emergency situations, UNICEF is committed to ensuring the following.

31. Health. In emergency situations, UNICEF strives to ensure that the basic health needs of children are met. UNICEF gives particular emphasis to ensuring that children have access to basic health services, are protected from vaccine-preventable childhood diseases and benefit from prevention and treatment of diarrhoeal diseases. Where needed, UNICEF provides essential drugs and supports the rehabilitation and revitalization of primary health services. UNICEF gives high priority to the reproductive health needs of women and adolescent girls, including prenatal and post-natal care, safe delivery practices, the prevention of HIV infection and treatment for trauma-related violence. Special efforts also are made to ensure that the health and rehabilitation needs of children with disabilities are met.

32. Food and nutrition. UNICEF strives in emergencies to ensure the nutritional well-being of children and recognizes the link between good nutrition and adequate household food security, adequate maternal and child care, and adequate health services and environmental hygiene. Where needed, UNICEF provides high-energy protein foods and micronutrients, including iron/folate, vitamin A and iodine supplements, and supports nutritional rehabilitation programmes for children. UNICEF gives high priority to the promotion of household food security through selective inputs to enhance family food production and supports income-generating activities for women.

33. Water supply and sanitation. To ensure that affected populations have access to at least the minimum required amount of safe water and to prevent or control cholera, diarrhoeal disease and other water- or sanitation-related diseases, UNICEF seeks in emergency situations to ensure the rapid availability of potable water supplies and facilitates the safe disposal of excreta. Where needed, UNICEF ensures the delivery of emergency water supplies, establishes sanitation facilitates and supports hygiene education. UNICEF facilitates the repair and restoration of water sources and, in urban areas, water and sewerage systems.

34. Protection. In emergencies, UNICEF actively promotes respect for children's rights as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other applicable international humanitarian law instruments, giving particular attention to the prevention of abuse, violence, exploitation, neglect and discrimination. Key protection activities supported by UNICEF include the dissemination of information; training and advocacy with all parties in positions to protect children; the strengthening of legal norms and judicial systems to ensure children's protection; negotiating access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance; supporting implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and monitoring major violations; and identifying children at risk and mobilizing assistance for children in need of special protection. In situations of armed conflict, UNICEF advocates with parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian principles, to not target children and other civilians, and to allow humanitarian access to civilian victims of the conflict.

35. Children in need of special protection and care. UNICEF gives priority in emergencies to ensuring the well-being and recovery of children who require special protection and care. The categories of children in such circumstances vary according to the situation, but commonly include: any children not in the care of their family, such as unaccompanied children, children in institutions,

street children and child soldiers; children who have been abused, exploited and/or traumatized, such as children with disabilities, victims of torture, children in prostitution and children who have witnessed extreme violence; children whose basic survival and developmental needs are not being met, such as neglected children, children of severely marginalized families and children in severely impoverished homes; and children in conflict with the law, such as children in detention.

36. UNICEF supports a range of remedial services to ensure recovery and enhance the care and protection, as well as the social reintegration of such children. Priority is given to help families avoid separation and to reunite separated children with their families. UNICEF supports efforts to meet the special physical, psychological and social needs of affected children and to facilitate their social reintegration.

37. Special needs of displaced populations. UNICEF gives special emphasis to ensuring that children among internally displaced populations have access to the full range of basic emergency services they require - health, nutrition, water and sanitation, protection, the special services required for children in need of special care and protection, emergency education, family support, non-food relief and support for settlement. In refugee emergencies, when needed, UNICEF works in collaboration with UNHCR in providing selective services to children.

38. Education. UNICEF supports the rapid re-establishment of education as an essential emergency service. UNICEF supports emergency education services both to ensure that children do not miss essential educational opportunities and because of the critically important role educational activities have on the psycho-social well-being of children through the normalization of routines that it brings. In emergencies, UNICEF supports community and parental efforts to rapidly restart educational activities, to rebuild and refurnish essential school facilities, to develop education materials and to train education leaders and teachers.

39. Family support. Where the well-being of children is critically at risk because of acute family destitution, UNICEF supports emergency efforts to enhance the coping skills of the most vulnerable families. UNICEF assistance is usually in support of the mobilization of community efforts on behalf of vulnerable families; participatory social and economic actions to meet essential needs, particularly food sufficiency; and, if necessary, works projects.

40. Non-food relief. In emergencies, UNICEF provides selected basic, non-food relief items for affected families when such items are critically needed and not otherwise available. These items are generally limited to emergency shelter materials, water storage containers and food cooking equipment.

VI. STRATEGIES

41. In an effort to ensure that all the emergency health, nutrition, water supply and sanitation, protection, education and non-food relief needs of affected children are met, and that the needs of children in the most vulnerable families and children requiring special protection and care are met, the UNICEF response is based on the 10 strategies described below.

42. Prevention. UNICEF seeks through all means available to help societies avoid emergencies by helping to identify and address the root causes of related threats.

43. Preparedness. UNICEF supports the development of emergency readiness of all key services required in emergency situations for the safety and well-being of children. Particular attention is given to enhancing the emergency readiness of the health, nutrition, water supply and sanitation, education and social services sectors of national- and community-level public services. UNICEF also emphasizes maintaining an internal state of readiness for the emergency services it provides and recognizes five key aspects to readiness: programme readiness; operations readiness; collaboration readiness; capacity-building; and personnel safety.

44. Assessment of risks and needs. UNICEF gives priority to systematic and regularly-updated assessments of acute threats and emergency needs of children. Three types of assessments are undertaken: (a) as part of country programming efforts, a regular analysis of underlying risks to the survival, protection and development of children; (b) in emergency situations, regular comprehensive assessments of children's circumstances and needs, carried out as a planning tool for defining appropriate intervention, collaboration and advocacy; and (c) also in emergencies, periodic special assessments of any particular risk or group of children requiring exceptional efforts to ensure their survival, protection and development.

45. Development of emergency response plans. Based on emergency assessments of risks and needs, UNICEF supports the rapid development of comprehensive action plans for addressing child-related emergency concerns. Such plans are seen as a basic tool for effective implementation and for coordination of the emergency response.

46. Mobilization of action. UNICEF works assertively to mobilize appropriate action to meet the emergency and recovery needs of children. Advocacy for action includes raising awareness of acute risks; of emergency survival, protection and development needs of affected children; and of the actions required to address those needs.

47. Rehabilitation and recovery. In its emergency cooperation, UNICEF focuses on the recovery and future well-being of the child, through local capacity-building to meet immediate needs, to reduce vulnerabilities and promote self-reliance, and through the strengthening of vulnerable health, basic education and social service systems upon which the child's well-being depends.

48. Coordination. UNICEF facilitates inter-agency coordination of emergency-related efforts related to children's concerns. Unless designated "lead agency" for the overall coordination of an international emergency response by the United Nations Secretary-General, UNICEF focuses more specifically on the coordination of emergency health, nutrition and water supply and sanitation services, as well as on emergency education efforts and special measures required for children in need of special protection and care.

49. Technical support. UNICEF mobilizes technical support, when needed, for the development and implementation of appropriate emergency and recovery programmes to meet children's needs and for the development of policy frameworks on which such programmes depend.

50. Relief supplies and equipment. UNICEF provides essential emergency goods, supplies and equipment required for the survival and well-being of children in emergency situations on the basis of need and depending on the availability of resources. The usual categories of supplies and equipment most commonly provided by UNICEF include those required for emergency health, water supply and sanitation, education and programmes for children in especially difficult circumstances, as well as supplemental nutrition and some essential non-food relief items for general distribution. UNICEF also has in readiness a full range of essential supplies and equipment for mounting large-scale emergency operations.

51. Financial support. To enable essential emergency services to be provided to children and their families, UNICEF provides financial support to selected parties involved in service delivery.

VII. STRENGTHENING UNICEF CAPACITY

52. UNICEF has acknowledged the need to reinforce its capacity to respond rapidly and appropriately to emergencies that threaten the survival and well-being of children and their families. To this end, several remedial actions were initiated in 1995 which form the basis for continuing efforts to reinforce the organization's capacity and effectiveness in emergency response.

53. Review of mission, policies and strategic priorities, of which the current paper is a product. The review incorporates extensive consultation with sister agencies, NGOs, donor countries, National Committees for UNICEF, host Governments and other partners, as well as considerable in-house discussion. An ongoing critical analysis continues to assess the effectiveness of UNICEF cooperation in meeting needs as the basis for appropriate changes in strategy and approach.

54. Human resource development. UNICEF seeks to develop new systems of technical support which draw on partners of excellence and which enhance in-house knowledge and skills through the following:

(a) Standby agreements with partner organizations. UNICEF seeks improved and more cost-effective human resource mobilization through cooperation with a range of partners. UNICEF gives priority to supporting the capacity development and networks of partners in the south, as the basis for south-south partnership for children in emergencies. A number of agreements already have been concluded, in both north and south, with partner organizations, professional networks and centres of excellence which can rapidly mobilize technical expertise necessary to complement internal UNICEF capacity;

(b) Creation of rapid response teams. Senior staff are now on standby, available for immediate deployment to crisis locations to enhance or establish a

UNICEF presence. The designated staff are experienced in emergency programming, supply and logistics, administration, finance and management. The Government of Italy has made available airlift capacity for the rapid deployment of the rapid response team and essential equipment to an emergency location;

(c) Staff training. Work is under way to complete the UNICEF Emergency Handbook, Emergency Supply Catalogue and emergency programming manuals. Training processes and methods are also under review, while new training materials are being finalized. For example, gender perspectives are being incorporated into the training of staff involved in planning and implementing emergency programmes. Improved linkages between regular and emergency country programming are being developed to enhance capacity for analysis of vulnerability and root causes of conflict, for risk assessment and monitoring, and for preparedness planning;

(d) Staff welfare. In the field of staff welfare, experience gained in Eastern and Southern Africa in staff counselling, briefing and debriefing is being extended within the organization, and several groups of staff in different regions have undergone training in debriefing procedures. Procedures regarding staff welfare in emergency environments also are being standardized.

55. Strengthening management: reinforcement of headquarters capacity. An Operations Centre is now functioning within the Office of Emergency Programmes at UNICEF New York headquarters, providing a locus for field/headquarters communications, information management and retrieval. The Division of Personnel has updated its human resources inventory for emergency mobilization and constantly monitors potential or actual threats to staff security in the field, while the Office of Information Resources Management has consolidated its technical expertise and field support capacity on communication procedures and technology.

56. Strengthening management: internal operations management. Within the context of the corporate review of management practices and efficiency, UNICEF is undertaking a complete review of emergency operating procedures, operational and financial rules, regulations and guidelines, programme and expenditure monitoring systems and donor reporting standards. Attention is being paid to both streamlining systems and to assuring improved compliance with operating rules, regulations and procedures.

57. Materials management. The development and expansion of standby stockpiles of essential supplies, equipment and transportation are well advanced for immediate deployment as required. Stockpiles comprise material for emergency assistance activities, as well as communications and warehousing equipment, office equipment and staff survival packs. UNICEF supply operations at Copenhagen and a network of supply and procurement officers world-wide provide UNICEF with a unique resource and capability to respond quickly to emergency situations. As a follow-up to the 1994 management study of UNICEF, efforts are currently under way to further streamline the efficiency, effectiveness and rapidity of the organization's supply and procurement functions.